

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A method for separating a lump piece of a rosette plant, said method comprising:

- gripping said rosette plant and positioning said rosette plant parallel to a longitudinal axis of an elongated holder, which comprises a longitudinal opening at least along the longitudinal axis;

- introducing a lump piece of said ~~rosette~~ rosette plant into the holder by way of said longitudinal opening;

- with a cutting element, cutting off the lump piece along a cutting plane parallel to the longitudinal axis, while closing the longitudinal opening, so that the introduced cut-off lump piece is enclosed in the holder, such that the holder encloses the introduced part of the lump piece, at least in combination with the cutting element, along a substantially complete circumference around the longitudinal axis of the holder, so that a sprout retains pointing in a direction remote from a growing medium; and

- removing the enclosed cut-off lump piece from the holder.

2. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, further comprising cutting off a cut-off part of the lump piece of the rosette plant enclosed in the holder along a second cutting plane.

3. (currently amended) The method according to claim 1, wherein the removal from the holder takes place while retaining pointing in a direction remote from the growing medium orientation.

4. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the cutting off of the lump piece is performed by rotation of two half-round sections engaging each other along a rotation axis, during which the sections cuttingly glide along each other, such that after rotation the sections form a cylinder in which the cut-off lump piece is received.

5. (currently amended) The method according to claim 1, further comprising a step of blowing out the cut-off lump piece enclosed in the holder using compressed air.

6. (currently amended) An apparatus for separating a lump piece of a rosette plant, said apparatus comprising:

- an elongated holder which comprises a longitudinal opening at least along the longitudinal axis; and

- a first cutting element for cutting off a lump piece of said rosette plant along a cutting plane parallel to the longitudinal axis, while closing the longitudinal opening, so that an introduced part of the cut-off lump piece is enclosed in the holder, such that the holder enclosed the introduced part of the lump piece, at least in combination with the cutting element, along a substantially complete circumference around the longitudinal axis of the holder, so that a sprout retains pointing in a direction remote from a growing medium.

7. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the apparatus comprises a transverse opening which is oriented transversely to the longitudinal axis.

8. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 7, wherein the apparatus comprises a second cutting element for cutting off a part of the rosette plant enclosed in the holder along a second cutting plane transversely to the longitudinal axis, while closing the transverse opening.

9. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the holder has a cross-section and is arranged so that, when in an enclosed condition, the cut-off lump piece is clampingly enclosed, so that upon removal the cut-off lump piece

retains to point in a direction remote from the growing medium orientation.

10. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the elongated holder comprises a first half-round section, and the first cutting element comprises a second half-round section, which first and second sections engage each other along a rotation axis and, upon rotation, carry out a cutting movement, so that after rotation the sections form a cylinder in which a part of the cut-off lump piece can be received.

11. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the sections are arranged to carry out an axial movement relative to each other during the rotation.

12. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the apparatus comprises an expelling element for removing the enclosed cut-off lump piece from the holder.

13. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the expelling element is arranged to expel the cut-off lump piece along the longitudinal axis of the holder.

14. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the expelling element comprises an outflow longitudinal opening oriented along the longitudinal axis of the holder for blowing out compressed air.

15. (previously presented) The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the outflow longitudinal opening is provided in a second cutting element, so that the second cutting element, after having carried out a cutting movement and having cut-off stems from the lump piece, positions the outflow longitudinal opening so that the cut-off lump piece can be blown out by using compressed air.

16. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the second cutting element is connected to a backplane of the apparatus with a pair of parallel-arranged leaf springs.

17. (currently amended) An automated apparatus, comprising:

- image recognition means for identifying a rosette plant to be multiplied;
- a gripper for gripping the rosette plant and positioning the rosette plant ~~it~~;

- an apparatus according to claim 6, which cuts off and encloses the rosette plant;
- transport and manipulation means for transporting and manipulating a growing medium, into which the cut-off plant is introduced; and
- control means for controlling the gripper, the apparatus, and the transport and manipulation means under control of the image recognition means.

18-19. (cancelled)